DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 319 863 UD 027 477

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TITLE	The Role of the School in Creating a Supportive Learning Environment for Minority Students.
INSTITUTION	Hawaii Univ., Manoa. Coll. of Education.
PUB DATE	Apr 90
NOTE	11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Boston, MA, April 16-20, 1990).
PUB TYPE	Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Education; *Core Curriculum; *Educational Environment; Elementary Secondary Education; *Equal Education; *Ethnic Relations; Multiple Regression Analysis; Questionnaires; School Organization; *Student Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS	Hawaii; *Invitational Education

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the long-term effects of a school environment with characteristics that indicate invitational education is being realized at the institutional level on students from the University of Hawaii Laboratory High School (ULS). Students of many races, ethnic groups, and socioeconomic levels study together in a program where all are taught from the same intensive academic curriculum. This study looks at the impact of this environment on attitudes of graduates, focusing on the influence of the school on their perceptions of their peers, teachers, and the curriculum. Academic records and student questionnaires were used to collect data. Questionnaire results indicate that the students develop positive attitudes that endure after they have left the school. Furthermore, there was no significant difference on student ratings attributable to their ethnic group. Most of the graduates support the idea of a "core curriculum" in which there is no choice of academic courses to take. Finally, regardless of their academic achievement and ethnicity, all of the subjects responded similarly to the questionnaire items related to school discipline, school atmosphere, student-teacher relations, and student-student relations. A discussion of the educational significance of these findings is presented. Two tables are included, along with seven references. (JS)

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The Role of The School in Creating A Supportive Learning Environment for Minority Students

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A paper presented at the annual meeting of
the American Educational Research Association
April, 1990
Boston, MA

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OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study was to investigate the long term effects of a school environment which would seem to meet the characteristics of a school in which invitational education is being realized at the institutional level. At the University of Hawaii Laboratory High School (ULS), students of many races and ethnic groups study together in a highly structured program. The student body is extremely small, and all take the same academic curriculum with few electives. The focus is on academics, and ethnicity is not considered in determining one's course of study. The current study looked at the impact of this type of environment on the attitudes of graduates, focusing on the influence of the school on their perceptions of their peers, teachers, and the curriculum.

PERSPECTIVES

There is an argument often found by implication in educational research that students from under-represented minority groups or from low socio-economic status (SES) groups need special educational programs to be successful in a competitive society (Kitano, 1980; Jordan, 1981). These special educational programs have usually been created by tracking students in terms of their academic achievement. The teachers separate the students into different curriculum patterns in which courses taken vary widely in expectations, teaching methods, and content. Usually the students in the lowest tracks are disproportionately from minorities or poor families (Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985).

One area that researchers have failed to systematically investigate has been the result of involving all students, regardless of ethnicity, academic achievement, and SES, in a traditional academic program where students are held accountable for their own behavior and performance, but where all students are known and supported at a personal level by school personnel, from the aides to the principal. Empirical evidence has demonstrated that tracking or ability grouping is generally ineffective (Slavin, 1987). Tracking is not the best way to recognize and account for individual differences. Offering all students equal access to knowledge is the most equitable way to truly address individual differences (Goodlad, 1984). No students, just because they are low achievers or are from minorities, should be excluded from "high status" courses (Goodlad & Oakes, 1988), or other curriculum options which are available to their more advantaged peers.

Of course, simply putting all the students into one curriculum may not be effective unless the concepts of discipline and a strong support system from teachers and families are considered to be one of the essential elements of the school. All students should be known and supported at a personal level by school personnel, from the aides to the principal. The question is, are such programs supportive of, or detrimental to the academic and personal development of Pacific and Asian students?

METHOD

The research for this study was conducted at the University of Hawaii Laboratory High School. The school enrolls children K-12 and is part of the Curriculum Research and Development Group

within the College of Education at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. The school population is a cross-section of students representing all ethnic, racial, and ability groups found within the public schools of the State of Hawaii. Unlike most laboratory schools affiliated with universities, ULS is designed to do curriculum product development and research, and is not used for pre-service teacher education. At ULS, students of Caucasian, Hawaiian, Samoan, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Filipino, and mixed ancestry (mostly Caucasian-Asian) backgrounds study together in a highly structured educational program.

The structured academic curriculum provided at ULS requires that all students go through the same demanding courses. These courses are English, mathematics, science, social studies, art/technology, music, physical education, and learning laboratory. Ninth grade students also take a computer class twice a week. A second language (Hawaiian, Japanese, or French) is required for grade 10, 11, and 12. There are also electives for the last period of the school day, when students may choose from a variety of courses which interest them, such as stage band, Japanese kimono culture, ancient Polynesian dance, choir, debate, and spots.

Even though the academic program at ULS is very intense, the small student body (50 students at each grade level) and the close relationships with faculty and staff, create a supportive, family atmosphere, and the relationships among students, and teachers are also family-like. The principal knows all the students personally, and she makes sure that the students know

that everybody in the school is welcomed and supported. This one-to-one close attention lets the students feel they are an important part of the school. The administrators' and teachers' close attention and encouragement lets the students concentrate on their academic achievement. Thus, the school environment is seen as a model of invitational education at the institutional level.

DATA SOURCE

Data were collected through two approaches. First, the academic records of all students of ULS from 1979 to 1988 were examined. This included their GPA for grades 8 through 12, and their Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores. Demographic data included the students' ethnic background, gender, age of entry into ULS, and their parents' SES.

Second, a 56 item questionnaire was developed in cooperation with the faculty and staff of ULS, and was distributed to all graduates (N = 511) since 1979. The questionnaire sought the graduates' perceptions of their education, and their relationships with their teachers and fellow students. Data were collected on attitudes toward various aspects of the curriculum, administrative structure, and the impact of ULS on their life since graduation.

RESULTS

One hundred eighty two students responded the questionnaire. The distributions of subjects broken down by ethnicity are provided in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 About Here

Table 2 provides mean ratings and standard deviations of satisfaction with various features of ULS by the respondents.

Insert Table 2 About Here

The generally high ratings seem to demonstrate that in the environment of this school, the students develop positive attitudes which endure after they have left the school.

On those questionnaire items asking the graduates' attitudes oncerning aspects of ULS, the respondents gave higher ratings (mean=4.04 on the scale of 1 to 5) on the items relating to such issues as attitude toward school discipline, and student-teacher relations, student-student relations, than they did on items related to the academic curriculum (mean=3.78). The result of a multiple regression analysis demonstrated that there was no significant difference on their ratings attributable to the students' ethnic group (F=.45, n.s. for items related to learning environment, F=.25, n.s. for items related to academic curriculum). Most of the graduates (84.3%) support the idea of a "core curriculum" in which there is no choice of academic courses to take.

The analysis of the questionnaires clearly showed that ethnicity was not a significant factor in influencing their overall attitudes toward ULS (F=2.5, n.s.). Regardless of their

academic achievement and ethnicity, all of the subjects responded similarly to the items related to school discipline, school atmosphere, student-teacher relations, and student-student relations ($F=.41$, n.s., $F=.45$, n.s. respectively). However, in ratings on the academic programs such as mathematics, English, science, and social studies, high achievers rated these programs relatively low compared to low achievers ($F=4.82$, $p<.05$).

Since the students in ULS are selected to be ethnically, academically and socio-economically representative of the population in Hawaii, and given the small school population, these students were studying with a very heterogeneous groups of peers. Their experiences in studying with a wide range of schoolmates were perceived very positively, and were seen as helpful for their life after ULS (mean=4.29 on the scale of 1 to 5). In addition, the positive, supportive environment combined with an intensive academic program seems to facilitate students' academic achievement.

EDUCATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

The results of this study show that in general the ULS graduates of all ethnic backgrounds feel positive about the structured academic curriculum. Clearly, in terms of their positive attitudes towards their school experiences, requiring all students to go through the traditional academic program combined with high expectations has proven to be successful at ULS.

Invitational education takes various forms even within a school. Inviting all students into one curriculum regardless of their ethnicity, academic ability, and their parents' SES is

certainly one form of realizing invitational education at the institutional level. High and low achievers alike have access to "high status" courses at ULS, unlike in a tracked curriculum. The accomplishment and positive feeling toward ULS by these low achievers clearly demonstrate ULS's success in implementing a curriculum for all the students.

This success may be largely attributable to the philosophy of ULS that each student is a unique human being. ULS also emphasizes the value of each ethnic group and treats all students with respect. Epstein (1986) calls this "particularistic treatment" which implies special attention for the unique qualities of individuals -- students receiving family-like treatment, attention, and affection from teachers. She concluded that students who receive family-like treatment are likely to have more positive attitudes about school and be more successful academically. It would seem that the invitational atmosphere of this school could be a model for other institutions faced with student alienation and academic failure. The results of creating this atmosphere can assist students to find satisfaction and self-motivation throughout their lives, in school and beyond.

Table 1

Ethnic Distribution of Respondents

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
N	33	50	35	10	13	4	37

1 = Caucasian 2 = Japanese 3 = Hawaiian and part-Hawaiian
4 = Filipino 5 = Chinese 6 = Korean 7 = Mixed

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of Ratings of the Features of ULS

Features of ULS	Mean	SD
Academic program	3.77	.84
Administration	3.56	.85
Art/technology	4.17	.77
Athletic program	4.09	.89
Drama	3.33	1.01
Electives	3.07	1.08
English	3.64	.97
Extra-curricular activities	3.65	.97
Math	3.94	.91
Music	4.00	.91
Physical education	3.58	.93
Preparation for "life after ULS"	3.38	1.07
School atmosphere	4.06	.85
School discipline	3.46	1.01
School facilities	2.74	.98
Science	3.53	.97
Second language	3.47	.97
Social studies	3.61	.94
Student-student relations	4.34	.82
Student-teacher relations	4.22	.75
Teaching faculty	3.98	.69

Scale of 1 to 5
1 = Very poor
2 = Poor
3 = Average
4 = Good
5 = Very good

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